

largeness of the plan, and inquired if the town were prepared for such an undertaking, the *Sheffield Independent* answered:—

"Perhaps not, just now; but there are several considerations that may tend to prepare it. In the first place, if the town is to build, as build it must ere many years have elapsed, it must look beyond the present. A public building is not to be made like a coat, to fit exactly when made, and be soon worn out. It should be built for two centuries, or more. The same far-seeing spirit which ages ago led our forefathers to build their parish churches on a noble scale, should influence us in public buildings now. If we were to turn the question into a rule-of-three sum, and say—As the population of Sheffield in 1110 was to the parish church then built, so is the population of the town in 1847 to the public building required,—the result would show that the plan proposed is a very moderate one, and that our ancestors did greater things than we dare even imagine."

A WHISPER ABOUT TOMBSTONES.

Sir,—The desecration of graveyards is one amongst the many evidences of the laxity into which church discipline had fallen in the 18th century. There are not a few surviving, amidst a cloud of witnesses, who can bear testimony to the fact, that the glebe and the churchyard were treated alike, as affording pasturage, not only to the vicar's sheep, but also to his horse; and not unfrequently was the grass which grows over rural graves, let to the village butcher for the same uses. It seemed to be entirely forgotten that the ground had been hallowed by prayer and blessing, and the form of consecration could never have been in the thoughts or memories, perhaps not in the knowledge, of those to whom the guardianship of these sacred precincts was entrusted. It requires not our pen to enumerate the "indignities," to which in former days our metropolitan, in an especial manner, and partially our rural churchyards, were exposed. Much it must be admitted, has been effected in the way of improvement, yet still more remains to be done, ere "the reverence due to such places" can be said to be restored. The subject itself must be left to the serious consideration of the clergy; one good example would be speedily followed by a whole district, and the wander would soon be, how such reformations had been so long neglected.

The object of this brief paper is to call the attention of the clergy in particular and the public in general to a question, which though it cannot be numbered amongst acts of desecration, is yet a great violation of propriety and good taste. It is to present, if possible, a check to the hideous fashion of our country tombstones that this communication has been written. There is, at present, nothing in these memorials of a Christian character; they are as unmeaning as they are deformed, and on wonder, since they have been left to the tasteless minds and hands of common stone-cutters, whilst men of taste have been inactive spectators of the erection of sepulchral testimonials, which witness to any thing rather than the religious feelings of those who erect them, and who had neither help to guide nor model to which they could refer. In some of these rude attempts, the parish stocks seems to have furnished a pattern, a very frequent eyecore in Buckinghamshire and some parts of Middlesex. In others, the milestone and the tombstone appear to have sprung from the same design; and the coal-scuttle, the celaret, and the muniment are all of the same formula. I fearlessly proclaim, then, that the cross is the most fitting, the most appropriate, the most graceful emblem on the tombstone of a Christian. If the truth must be told, we as a Protestant people, are (unconsciously, perhaps) ashamed of the cross, and we endeavour to hide our shame or conceal our ignorance under the plea that it is popish. Away with such prejudice. The cross was adopted in the Christian church centuries before the corruptions of popery were heard of; and it will be cherished as a holy sign long after the earth is swept clear of them. The Vatican itself bears witness to the fact, that in the very infancy of Christianity the monumental inscriptions and emblems, amongst others the cross, in its various forms, were all indications of that pure form of religion which

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we now cherish under the name of Protestantism.

And what on our tombstones have we substituted for the emblem of our faith? Cherubs' heads, and, worse than all, the insignia of paganism,—scythes and urns, and inverted torches,—anything and every thing rather than the victorious sign; and shame upon our Christianity, shame upon our taste, shame upon our Protestantism, we suffer our cathedrals to become pantheons, and the gods of the heathen to be our illustrations of Christian art.

It would lead me into too wide a field of discussion were I to speak of cemeteries. It is now too late to repair the mischief as regards our more populous cities; we have missed the model of primitive usage, we have suffered the management to fall into the hands of public companies, jobbing for profit, and looking to dividends. Yet even these places may be reformed as regards both the tombstone and its inscription, and more especially those that have undergone the rite of consecration. It has been suggested, that henceforth cemeteries should be severed from those who regard them only as places of profit; they should be connected with the church, and consecrated as are churches.

But leaving cemeteries out of the question, and confining our remarks to village churchyards, I have ventured to submit a few designs in passing, simple and of easy execution either in wood or stone, to the notice of those who feel an interest in the subject, and who I cannot but think, would soon take pleasure in the improvement of their churchyards. The first step, I am persuaded, must be taken by the clergy; the public mind must be gradually enlightened, and old prejudices removed. The people require to be taught the reverence due to the dust of man; they must be convinced that churchyards are sacred places, that they were, and still are, called in the old Saxon phrase "God's A-cres," where the seeds of the resurrection are sown, and the human harvest

shall be gathered. Let such impressions be conveyed, and a religious feeling, but as regards their consecration and the humblest efforts of art in monumental testimonials, would follow. These designs are but first attempts at improvements on the prevailing style. They may serve better than words to express my meaning, and they may be easily changed and improved.

We long to see also an improvement in our churchyard epitaphs; but this is not within the scope or design of the present communication. Here again is a subject which the clergy should take into their own hands, and exercise judiciously an authority with which a wise law has invested them, and which their own neglect alone has suffered to fall into disuse. The planting of churchyards is so an opportunity for the display of taste and feeling. The row, the cedar, and the cypress suggest solemn and scriptural thoughts. The avenue of trees affords an appropriate walk for the contemplative student. In this, as in every thing relating to churches and churchyards, let there be a due regard to the *grætas loci*—the spirit of the place—and we should see few great violations of propriety.

To compress all we have said on the subject of churchyards in a single sentence—let all be done decently and in order. The church has committed the bodies of her faithful children to the dust with prayer, for that follows be carried out in a kindred spirit; safety from indignities, Christian emblems above the dead, and Christian epitaphs, not to express immortal hopes or to perpetuate their remembrance. All should be, as it were, voices in the wilderness, testifying to the world of the past, and exhorting to preparation for the judgment to come.

J. S.

A little number of these designs has been published by Mr. B. L. at 10, Pall Mall, and is for sale at all bookshops and by the author, 10, Pall Mall, London.



PIERRE DE BOURBON: KILLED AT THE BATTLE OF POITIERS, 1366.

From the tomb in the Dominican's Church at Paris.